

Armed Forces and Uprisings: An Analysis of the Military Response to the Arab Uprisings

Abstract

Since 2011 there has been an increasing number of studies on the recent Arab uprisings which started in Tunisia in December 2010 and traveled across the Arab world. However, most of these studies are concentrated on understanding the protesters' point of view while very few studies attempted at understanding the decisions of some Arab regimes to use force, which indeed resulted in the escalation of many of these uprisings. This paper is one of these few research studies to look at the role of military institutions in the Arab world during the recent uprisings. Specifically, I ask: what factors shape the likelihood of Arab armies to intervene and use force in response to the mass demonstrations? I propose that two factors mainly influence the decision of Arab military elites: 1) cronyism within the military institutions; 2) tribal or ethnic divisions within the society at large. In this paper, I argue that an increase in cronyism in Arab military institutions and tribal or ethnic divisions in the society at large lead to increase the likelihood for the use of force and a military intervention to rescue a leader during the Arab Uprisings. The paper tests these two factors in nine different cases from the Arab world: Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Syria, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Algeria. These countries are divided into three categories: 1) countries in which regimes were changed "peacefully" (Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen); 2) countries in which armed conflicts and civil wars erupted (Syria, Libya); and 3) countries that survived (Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Algeria). I find that Arab armies that have a high level of cronyism and personal ties as well as tribal or ethnic divisions within their societies (Yemen, Libya, Syria, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia) are more likely to intervene and use force than Arab armies that are more nationally-oriented and which exists in societies where tribal and ethnic divisions are minimal (Tunisia, Egypt, and Algeria). I conclude by attempting to predict the future of Arab armies and to predict the structure of Syrian army in the post-Assad era.

Keywords

Arab world, uprisings, military institutions